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Is There Really Nothing to Discover in Nature? (Yes)

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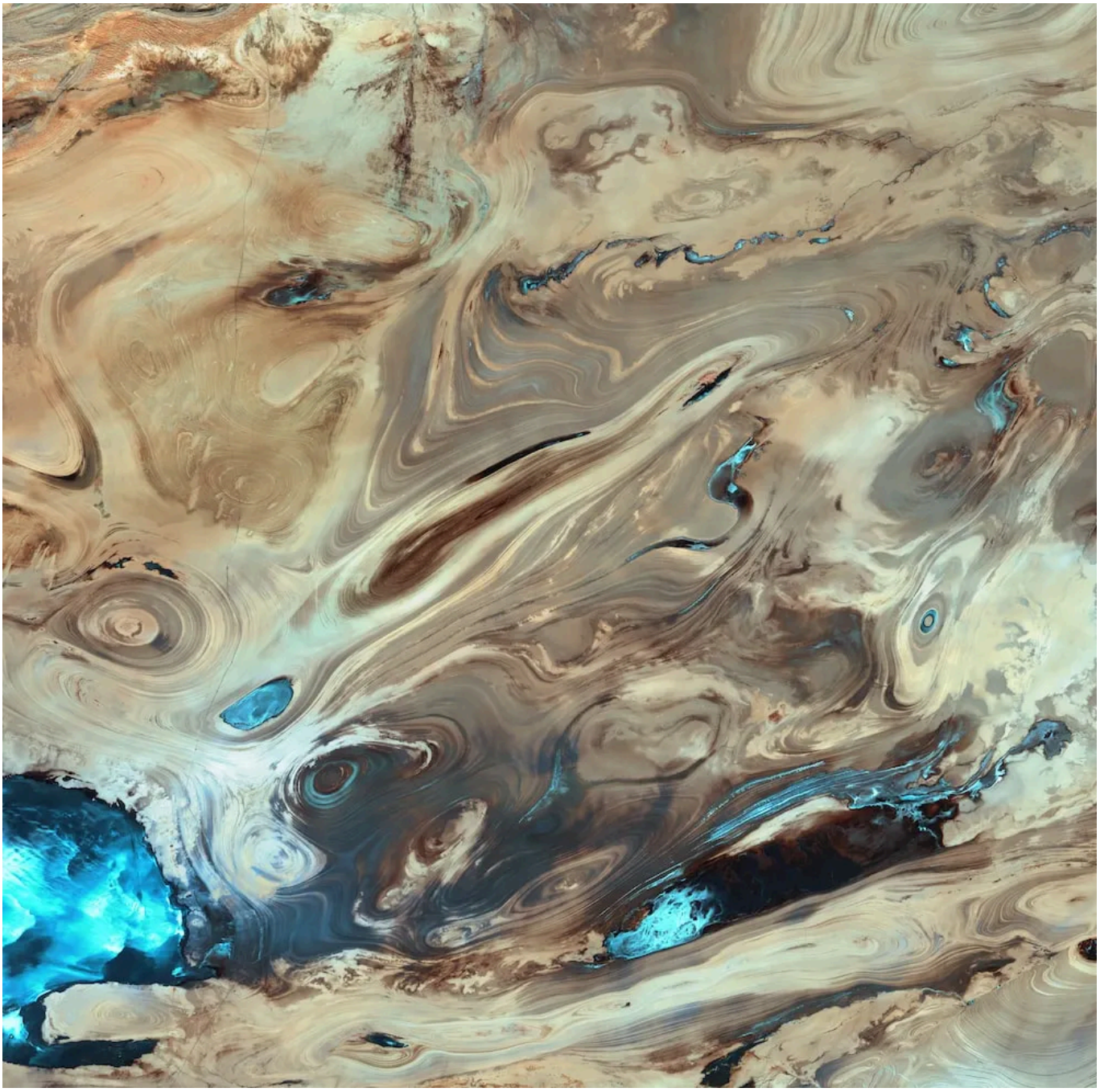
23

A close look at one passage from Paul B. Preciado's "Testo Junkie" in response to an Instagram comment



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My main purpose in writing this essay is to point out the lines of flight contained in Paul B. Preciado's proposed vision of nature — specifically, the need to shed the concept of nature as something external to the human existential realm. What I will write here relates in many ways to the conclusions I drew some time ago from the film *Tower. A Bright Day*. In an essay on it, I expressed the idea that nature should share the fate of God, as described by Friedrich Nietzsche. It should die, in a metaphorical sense, to

allow new concepts of planetary coexistence to rise from the ashes of the previous symbolic order. In what follows, I intend to expand on this thought and add to it the framework of a Preciadian critique of pharmacopornocapitalism.

The prompt for this essay came from a comment on one of my Instagram posts. It concerned a quote from the book *Testo Junkie*, an experimental piece that blurs the line between philosophy, political manifesto, and autobiography. The author, Paul B. Preciado, describes, on the one hand, the process of semiotechnological production of bodies that occurs in capitalist societies. On the other hand, he describes how his life has been affected by self-medication with testosterone without medical supervision, illustrating the author's attitude towards the control apparatuses that hold in their hands the tools with which we construct our identities. It is in this context that the following words were spoken. Let's take a closer look at them. Then we will try to present two ways of understanding their message — first the one with which I disagree, and then mine.

What Preciado says

> There is nothing to discover in nature; there is no hidden secret. We live in a punk hypermodernity: it is no longer about discovering the hidden truth in nature; it is about the necessity to specify the cultural, political, and technological processes through which the body as artifact acquires natural status.

The above quotation condenses some of the main themes of the book. For this reason, it provides a wonderful entry point into Paul Preciado's world, in which the boundary between nature and culture ceases to matter. Its disintegration reveals the processes of construction of two realities, neither

of which is more real than the other, that are bubbling under the surface of our symbolic systems. To see what kind of argumentation underlies Preciado's provocative claims, let's break down the quoted passage into parts.

Everything I say below will be about these few theses that I completely agree with:

1. There is nothing to discover in nature.
2. Attempting to discover hidden truths in nature is undesirable.
3. We should focus on the processes that construct what is natural.

Although I share the author's view, I recognize the need to explain the reasons for and benefits of the change in perspective. The theses posed mostly require asking the question "why?" because they go against the grain of the colloquial theories of the world that each of us carries in our minds without paying much attention to them. We are used to seeing the world through the lens of the natural/cultural dichotomy. Depending on political affiliation, these categories may be more rigid or looser. To a strictly conservative person, it is obvious that being a cisgender, heterosexual person is natural, while transgender identities and non-heteronormative sexual orientations are artificial creations trying to win against nature in a hopeless battle. In contrast, a more liberal-minded person (though still not far removed from the dominant discourse) will argue for the normalization — naturalization — of queer identities. Preciado takes a step in yet another direction, further to the left, noting a fundamental error in both perspectives. Each fights for space in some demarcated, abstract area. The essentialism displayed by both sides, inherent to perspectives that define a thing as natural, does not descend to the level of biological belonging or explicit metaphysical categorization. The ontology of naturalization —

existing in presupposition and not directly at issue — is essentially political. It is from this foundation that its refutation should begin.

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What emerges above all from Preciado's words quoted above is that nature is not something neutral. Being natural is not a basic state but a battlefield thoroughly imbued with political contingencies. To ignore the process of the political construction of naturalness is to allow an unnecessary discourse to manage the way we think; to waste energy on the struggle to be considered normal — natural — in the eyes of the majority, when the real struggle should be centered on tearing the enclosed realm of nature apart to reveal the empty middle ground of implicit political skirmishes. The claim that there is nothing to discover in nature puts the emphasis on the fact that it does not exist as an autonomous sphere, external to us and our culture, to be entered and exited. Preciado shows that the word "nature" or the adjective "natural" are overlays on a diverse, ever-changing reality in which the human-constructed and the natural are intertwined. Skyscrapers and anthills are equally natural — the only difference between the two is entirely political. In the same vein, the "nature vs nurture" debate is a wrongly put question. The process of the production of subjectivity transverses these two spheres. Their existence is also, first and foremost, political.

Should we strive to be more natural?

Living at peace with nature seems to be a widely accepted, intuitive goal. The person whose comment pushed me to write this essay also came from this

point of view. I will now cite their main arguments. I want to point out at this point that I do not intend to ridicule them. There is, as we will see, a lot of truth in their words. Our intuitions are essentially similar, though our conclusions could not be more different. The commenter expressed four basic arguments:

1. Preciado's book depicts the process of creating a bourgeois, over-intellectualized, dissociative persona that exerts the greatest influence on young people.
2. "It should be really normalized and seen as *natural* the act of transforming one's body as we are part of nature ourselves".
3. "Being trans or playing with gender should not need justification from some dissociative onanistic texts and pseudo-science pseudo-investigations called theory".
4. "There is so much to be discovered in nature. Actually it is the dissociation from nature that is confusing and sickening our species".

We can also represent the above words as follows: the words Preciado uses signify a progressive separation from nature — constructing a vision of man independent of anything not created by culture. Thus, he expresses the bourgeois attitude of man's superiority over his environment; modern egoism and immersion in the divine power of unlimited self-creation. This way of viewing the role of man in the world is meant to appeal to young people, who are most saturated with the ubiquitous artificiality and sterility of the man-made, controlled environment. Susceptible to suggestion, immersed in what has been built by a culture that stands on the foundations of its separation from nature, they absorb like sponges the narrative of the uniqueness of man and it is in it that they seek justifications for their identities. There is some truth in this. I agree that everything that surrounds

us — from language to the living space that guides the paths of our lives, to other people — shapes the gap between us and nature, whatever that nature is. Despite the fact that the concept of nature is quite fuzzy, separation remains a painfully felt fact. Alienation seems to be inherent to who we are. It destroys both us and the world. But the author of the comment assumes that we should get closer to nature, thus expressing a misunderstanding of what Preciado intended to convey.

I would therefore like to offer a counter-argument: as long as we do not destroy the conceptual division between the natural and the artificial, only struggle and violence will be possible around the concept of nature, not peace and harmony. To unite with nature requires the overthrow of a division rooted in the way we speak of it — in the third person, as if it were an entity external to us. At this point I must point out that I am not proposing instead to live in a cyberpunk dystopia where no one ever touches the grass and everything is covered in concrete. Such a proposal preserves the very opposition I seek to destroy. In the same way, some might say that nature is healing — connecting with it means getting better, whatever "better" might be — but, in agreement with Preciado, I'd say that it's just an artificially separated sphere of both our yearning for wholeness and the desire for autonomy. If we cannot go either way, we should find a third, devoid of dichotomous tension.

Now let's look at points 2 and 3. At first glance, I agree with both: yes, transforming one's own body is always okay and needs no justification. I consider it a fact and a necessary ethical stance. Exploring one's gender identity does not need to be legitimized by theory — by texts, discourse, whatever. It should be a neutral thing that just happens, without unnecessary reflection on whether it should be allowed. On this point, I support the person I'm discussing with in this essay one hundred percent.

However, some elements of their statement need to be corrected. The question arises: what is natural? If transformations of one's own body are allowed because we are part of nature, it will be reasonable to consider what is not allowed — what is not part of nature and who decides that it isn't. If we base consent for certain actions on their naturalness, we reopen the field of conflict, because for something to be part of nature, something must remain outside of nature. Opposites support each other. By keeping the word "nature" in this context, we bring into it the practices of experimenting with one's body, but at the same time we leave in the cultural sphere an indeterminate part of the world that cannot fit into this concept. If we say that **we** are part of **nature**, this phrase alone indicates that the separation has not disappeared — it is alive and well, having taken the form of our visits to the natural world. In this perspective, we exist as a separated sphere existing in something objective, while reality shows that nature, as a concept, is politically constructed from scratch, in no way neutral and objective. If the word "we" exists in something else, we are not that. The political, understood as the antagonism of self and alien, maintains its position as the core of our conceptualization of the world.

Let us recall again Preciado's words: "it is no longer about discovering the hidden truth in nature; it is about the necessity to specify the cultural, political, and technological processes through which the body as artifact acquires natural status." Preciado notes in this quote an important shift in perspective: when nature calls, it's my responsibility to look for the one who lends her the voice. There is nothing to discover in nature, because it does not stand outside of us, as an objective reality waiting for brave travelers to venture into its farthest corners in order to know it inside out — and thus dominate it. We construct it with measuring devices, methodologies, concepts, and practices that gradually become objectified, until the vision of the cosmos that they bring with them becomes obvious. At the intersection

of multiple flows, whether discursive or material — human expansion in space, forces that alter and subordinate terrain — lies nature, as something whose only inherent characteristic is to be something **in between**, the product of specific attitudes and, as Preciado says, semiotechnological tools.

To sum up: it's all political

Naturalness is political. TERFs seek to undermine the naturalness of transgenderedness; conservatives argue that homosexuality is unnatural because it does not serve reproduction; anarcho-primitivists contrast an unequivocally evil civilization with an idealized version of nature, pointing to the unnaturalness of human design and technology that removes us from direct experience of the world. The examples could be endless. But I think the message is clear — we cannot agree among ourselves about what is objectively natural. We cannot establish a coherent realm of nature separate from the unnatural, whatever that may be. Depending on the narrative, the technosphere mixes with the ecosphere, and prejudice and right-wing phobias push huge chunks of the population outside the natural margin. Nature is a battlefield. It is constructed from the ground up by what we want to push outside and define ourselves in contrast to. We objectify a certain vision of the world through years of tradition and invariably tense power relations at various levels, struggling to be able to call things normal and natural, without seeing that in doing so we open the field to denaturalization — we create another, alienated world, entering the house of nature on a staircase made of the bodies of those who have failed to qualify for our definition; and there will always be something or someone who doesn't meet our requirements. We can only talk about the environment if we do not see ourselves as an integral part of a complex, dynamic system. By talking about nature, we show that we have lost the path leading us back to the world and true being-with.

To sum up: can nature survive? It probably will — but it's not a reason not to try to dismantle it for the greater freedom for all.

Philosophy Ecology Nature Paul B Preciado

Written by machinic specters

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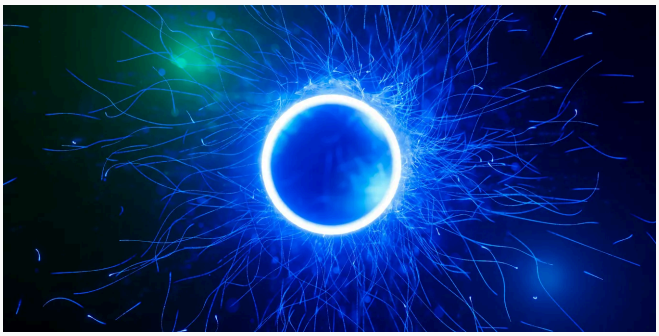

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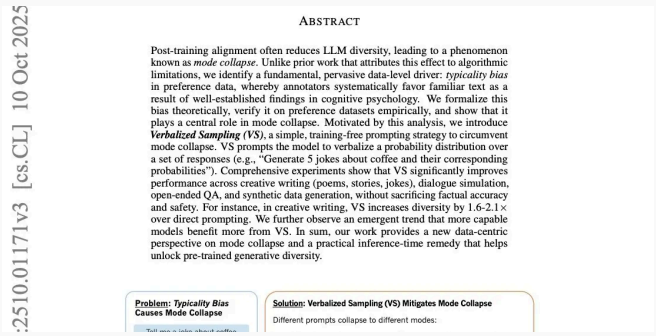
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Post-training alignment often reduces LLM diversity, leading to a phenomenon known as *mode collapse*. Unlike prior work that attributes this effect to algorithmic limitations, we identify a fundamental, pervasive data-level driver: *typicality bias* in preference data, whereby annotators systematically favor familiar text as a result of well-established findings in cognitive psychology. We formalize this bias theoretically, verify it on preference datasets empirically, and show that it plays a central role in mode collapse. Motivated by this analysis, we introduce ***Verbalized Sampling (VS)***, a simple, training-free prompting strategy to circumvent mode collapse. VS prompts the model to verbalize a probability distribution over a set of responses (e.g., "Generate 5 jokes about coffee and their corresponding probabilities"). Comprehensive experiments show that VS significantly improves performance across creative writing (poems, stories, jokes), dialogue simulation, open-ended QA, and synthetic data generation, without sacrificing factual accuracy and safety. For instance, in creative writing, VS increases diversity by 1.6-2.1× over direct prompting. We further observe an emergent trend that more capable models benefit more from VS. In sum, our work provides a new data-centric perspective on mode collapse and a practical inference-time remedy that helps unlock pre-trained generative diversity.
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